



June 19, 2014

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As Governors committed to ensuring that our students have access to 21st Century learning opportunities, we are writing to support your efforts to modernize the E-rate program and accelerate Wi-Fi access to millions more students this next funding year. More specifically, we are writing to encourage you to move swiftly to provide for the expanded use of E-Rate to cover internal WiFi connections in our classrooms. We encourage the Commission to utilize a portion of the unused and unspent funds you have identified to support schools, libraries, consortiums, or states that are ready to move forward with such plans to make an impact as soon as possible.

At a time when so many of our nation's students are connected to the Internet on a daily basis, and when educators see greater use of online materials as an immediate benefit to individual learners, wireless access has become as vital to classrooms as blackboards, textbooks, and pencils once were. Yet today, nearly 60 percent of schools in America lack sufficient Wi-Fi capacity to provide students with 21st Century educational learning opportunities. In fact, an estimated 40 percent of classrooms have no Wi-Fi access at all. And yet the 18-year-old E-Rate program, originally designed to bring Internet access to our classrooms, has not kept pace with technological change. As a result, the E-Rate provides absolutely no dollars for Wi-Fi, while spending more than a billion dollars a year on outdated technologies such as paging and directory assistance that do not directly contribute to learning. We owe it to our students, teachers and parents to do better.

Time is of the essence when it comes to educating our students. With each year that passes, an opportunity to improve their academic performance is lost. For this reason, we urge you to move quickly to issue an Order this summer that provides some relief to states that are ready to move forward with expanded WiFi. The consequences of inaction are enormous. Without action on new rules by this summer, we will miss out on the opportunity to impact investments in Wi-Fi for this coming funding year, and millions of our students will needlessly continue to be left behind.

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We also strongly believe that the Commission should consider using available funds for a one-time investment in projects that will spur the transition to the new environment made possible by any changes the Commission may include in its Order. At a time of rapid technological change, and the near-universal ability to share information about experiences and best practices, every school, library, consortium or state will benefit from the lessons learned in implementing expanded connectivity. We share your belief that funds invested smartly and early in these efforts will pay huge dividends for the states that follow.

We realize that it may not be possible to address every issue or concern in an undertaking as comprehensive as the effort to fully modernize E-Rate, a program started before Google was a public company and before iPods, iPhones, iPads, or Android devices were even conceived. However, we believe your approach is prudent to begin closing the Wi-Fi gap now while continuing to look at the longer-term program needs. We are committed, therefore, to continuing to support your efforts to modernize, expand, and strengthen the E-Rate program as you move forward. At the same time, we encourage you to move immediately in this docket, so as not to lose another school year or further delay benefits that could be realized now.

Thank you for your kind attention and consideration.

Sincerely,



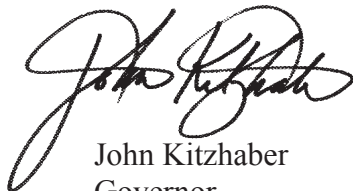
Martin O'Malley
Governor
State of Maryland



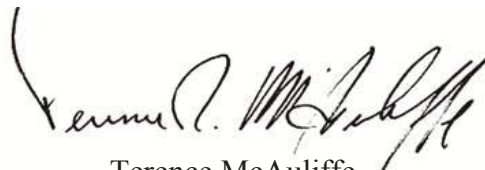
Phil Bryant
Governor
State of Mississippi



Pat McCrory
Governor
State of North Carolina



John Kitzhaber
Governor
State of Oregon



Terence McAuliffe
Governor
Commonwealth of Virginia

cc: The Honorable Mignon Clyburn
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
The Honorable Ajit Pai
The Honorable Michael O'Rielly